



Successes and Challenges: the Lived Experiences of Extension Implementers in Community Development Programs

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of extension implementers in the Philippine College Foundation, Valencia City Bukidnon. Specifically, aimed to explore the extension implementers driving force, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms. A phenomenological approach was employed, which involved in-depth interviews with key informants. Eleven themes were identified using Creswell's qualitative data analysis methods. It was found that the influence of other extension implementers, passion for service, and sense of responsibility were the driving forces of extension implementers. Moreover, financial constraints, scheduling conflict, participants' engagement, and limited resource persons were the challenges encountered. Furthermore, resourcefulness in implementation, being goal-oriented, effective communication strategies, and engaging in recreational activities were the coping mechanisms of extension implementers.

INTRODUCTION

Extension service programs are one of the four-fold functions of higher education institutions (HEIs) to improve people's quality of life within the community. It allows faculty, staff, and students to apply their knowledge and skills beyond the four corners of the classroom and foster the essence of volunteerism (Pizaña et al., 2021). Through the extension initiatives, the problems and issues in the community could be addressed through simple services such as seminars, trainings, and workshops (Gutierrez & Gant, 2018). The 1987 Philippine Constitution, Section 2 of Articles XIV on Education, Arts, Culture, and Sports, states that all educational institutions should ultimately support the sustainable integrated education system related to the needs of individuals and society (Malahay, 2019). The Philippine Development Agenda (PDA) 2020, funded by the Philippines Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), establishes intervention policies that promote societal development and deal with socioeconomic problems (Corpuz et al., 2022) and mandates that all higher educational institutions in the country should conduct an extension activity aligned with its vision and mission aside from the research and instruction.

As the school that trains for service, the Philippine College Foundation (PCF) continuously provides quality instruction, research, extension, and production that would contribute positively to its stakeholders (Uy et al., 2023). The institution encourages the active involvement of faculty, staff, and students to share their knowledge and proficiency with the individuals in the community. In this view, PCF appointed extension coordinators from each department to foster community extension activities. The extension implementers organize community extension activities anchored to their department's goals and objectives. Extension implementers are the major benefactors contributing to community progress (Lacea et al., 2021) and sustain an effective program that caters to economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects (Rubio et al., 2016). The conduct of extension services has numerous elements to consider, ensuring its sustainability. Implementers should fully capture the identified community's pressing needs, challenges, and available resources, which will serve as the basis of project development. They need to collaborate with the local government units (LGUs) and other concerned community agencies. Moreover, extensionists need to deal with diverse individuals during community activities. After the meticulous planning and arduous process undertaken by extensionists, challenges may arise during the implementation process (Santiago et al., 2022).

Despite the numerous studies emphasizing community extension services in higher education institutions, there remains a poor understanding of the lived experiences of extension implementers in private colleges like the Philippine College Foundation. Previous studies focused on quantitative evaluations of extension programs, overlooking the driving force and coping mechanisms of extension implementers in delivering community services. In addition, studies revealed the challenges encountered by extensionists, which caused them to lose motivation and become reluctant to continue the extension activities (Asio et al., 2022; Salazar, 2020). Furthermore, Sermona et al. (2021) highlighted the need to fulfill other functions within the institution as a factor that affected the conduct

of extension activities. However, the existing literature does not fully explore how extension implementers navigate the challenges and remain steadfast. The lived experiences of extension implementers are essential in identifying best practices and identifying sound approaches to addressing challenges (Nowakowska, 2021). Thus, this study explored the challenges and successes of extension implementers in one of the private higher education institutions in the Philippines. Furthermore, it provides valuable information on effectively handling and implementing community extension activities.

Statement of the Problem:

1. What are the driving forces of extension implementers in conducting community service?
2. What are the challenges encountered by extension implementers in conducting community service?
3. How do extension implementers cope with the challenges of delivering community extension services?

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This research utilized the phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of extension implementers at the Philippine College Foundation. The qualitative phenomenological method centers on interpreting people's experiences and revealing the essence of lived experiences (Given, 2008). Five extension implementers from various departments served as key informants in the study. They were provided with an approved letter and informed consent detailing the study's purpose, nature, voluntary participation, and the assurance of anonymity. The in-depth interview was conducted in a face-to-face setup.

The researchers used a recording notebook and a phone recorder that captured responses to guide questions. The questionnaire focused on implementers' driving forces, challenges, and coping mechanisms in delivering community development programs. For data verification, the researchers returned to the informants and shared the transcribed answers, and they got their affirmation to see if it fully reflected their insight. The researchers used Creswell's (2013) qualitative data analysis methods to interpret the interview information reliably.

The researchers followed six steps to analyze the qualitative data.

1. The data are systematically recorded in a documented form to gather important information and insights from the interviewees. Their responses are written on paper and organized for better comprehension.
2. The collected data are reviewed and read multiple times to distinguish the participant's viewpoints on their lived experience in community extension services.
3. The data are classified into corresponding themes, focusing on the challenges and successes that participants experienced in delivering community development programs.
4. The detailed description of the participants, including themes and settings, is utilized to execute meaningful insights and balanced interpretation.

5. Data analysis has presented the themes through a narrative approach reflecting the findings' structure and holistic perspective of the participants to ensure a strong and clear interpretation of the results.
6. The researchers integrated the experiences, ethical considerations, and learnings into an in-depth interpretation of the findings.

Creswell (2013) outlined steps to provide a precise framework for analyzing and interpreting the data. This procedure explored the characteristics of an individual's problem while adhering to intellectual and ethical principles. In this context, the challenges and successes faced by extension implementers in conducting community services were identified and explained using reliable and applicable methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers observed thematic analysis using the coding, categories, and subthemes methods and identified themes. Three themes emerged as the driving forces of the extension implementers which include influence of from other extension implementers, passion for service, and sense of responsibility. Five themes were the challenges encountered such as financial constraints, scheduling conflict, participant engagement, and limited resource persons. Finally, four themes were the coping mechanisms such as resourcefulness in implementation, goal-oriented, effective communication strategies, and engaging in recreational activities.

Driving Force of Extension Implementers

Theme 1: Influence from other Extension Implementers

Community service requires a strong dedication in serving the public. The social responsibility of being an extensionist is not just conducting an extension activity but making a difference in the community's progress. Each extensionist has a different determination and perseverance before becoming an extension implementer. Extensionist have different roots in being active implementers who help and serve the community.

Informants 3 and 5 shared, "*My perspective changed after listening to an experienced extensionist who shared her journey with so much joy. Her dedication to helping others and supporting the community inspired me to pursue this path.*" "*Everything changed after the previous extensionist gave me the role of extension coordinator and told me that the activity involved community service*". These statements of the two extension implementers indicate that the encouragement from other extension educators influenced and changed their perspective as extension implementers. However, the programs are not familiar to them, but their previous experience of their colleague inspired them to be part of the community's success (Lacea et al., 2021).

Moreover, informants 1, 2, and 5 had a common thought on their service-learning experience as college students. Informant 1 shared, *"During my college years, I began serving in community service. We had an assigned teacher whose job was to assist the community. My motivation was shaped during my college life – not because we were required to serve, but because I genuinely wanted to be part of helping the community"*. Informant 2 emphasized, *"My passion for helping communities began during my bachelor's degree. I encountered different people and groups throughout college, learning valuable lessons from them. Through these experiences, I realized the importance of taking action, as many communities face challenges that the extension implementers must address"*. Then, informant 5, *"When I was a college student, I was a member of several organizations inside and outside the institution. I also participated in community service activities"*. These rationales are evident that their personal or previous experience is one of the factors that influenced them to drive in community service (Stukas et al., 2014).

Based on the results, the experience of other extensions and previous experience has a boundless influence on extension implementers before becoming an educator. Inspiring leadership is related to team member dedication (Mazzetti & Schanfeli, 2024). During college, they came across different settings and learned the essence of community service. Their experience significantly impacted their work area, making them efficient and collective well-being (Dugyon, 2016).

Theme 2: Passion for Service

Community service involves a broad range of responsibilities, and the volunteers are needed to perform different duties and situations during the program execution. Extension implementers are motivated to serve the community because of their passion.

Informant 1 posited, *"It was a great opportunity to share my blessings and give what I could."* Informant 2, *"I realized the importance of taking action, as many communities face challenges that need to be addressed by the authorities."* In addition, informants 4 and 5 stated, *"I find it especially inspiring when I engage with the community in New Mexico, as they need for more knowledge, particularly regarding the programs we offer,"* and *"The true fulfillment comes from helping and serving the community"*. The compassion of the extension implementers in helping the community persists despite the strenuous duties (Kim et al., 2019). Their reasons for pursuing their passion for serving the community are reflected in sharing their expertise to address their needs (Nowaskowska, 2022).

Moreover, as informants 1, 2, 3, and 4 relayed, *"My passion for helping others and promoting kindness motivates me to do this job"*, *"I have a strong willingness to help without expecting anything in return and make a meaningful impact on the lives of other,"* *"I have believed in helping others and spreading kindness. This aligns with my values, as it allows me to extend my service and offer a helping hand to communities"*, and *"I believed in the importance of serving others, and this value drives my commitment to addressing community needs"*. Engaging in extension activities is associated with the personal values of each extensionist. They do not mind the different sources of their commitment to conducting an extension activity for the community as long as they have an impact and make them successful. The shared insights from

the extension implementer show that the extensionist's virtue of helping others has contributed to their willingness to help the community regardless of the external and internal compensation they would receive in the future.

Furthermore, extension implementers' motivation played an essential role in serving the community, especially those communities that need a provision from an individual inclined to aid their deficiency. As informant 1 stated, "*I developed a deep love for helping others. My passion for assisting people has become a part of who I am*", and informant 2 "*The opportunity to provide the right services to the people in the community we serve*". Then informant 3 shared that "*seeing the smiles of the people and the faces of the children motivates me*". Also, informant 4 shared that "*the values and passion, giving me a sense of fulfillment that keeps me engaged and committed to the cause*" and informant 5 "*it is also fulfilling to have a connection with them*".

These passages from the extension coordinators highlight their fulfillment in organizing a series of activities for the community. This feeling grows every time they see the innocent faces of the community. As a result, the virtue of helping others and the personal fulfillment of the extension implementers are opportunities for personal development and competence. These could foster a sense of positive change and generate a profound connection and optimistic relationship with the community (Paulican & Garcia, 2023).

Theme 3: Sense of Social Responsibility

Social activities are one of the responsibilities that others do not accept due to the physical demands involved in the activity. Social responsibility can be perceived only by those committed to their community service duties (Ismail, 2009). As informants 1 and 5 relayed, "*Helping the community through the program we provided could allow us to make an impact beyond just being a teacher*". This statement underscores that social responsibility is more than a benefit for the community. It could allow them to impact not only academic purposes but also the community's development. Community involvement and support are essential factors in helping the community progress. As Informant 1 stated, "*Implementing and establishing the community service to meet the community's needs, aligning with the department's programs*" and "*helping the community through the programs provided to them*" (informant 2). Also, informant 3 said, "*By simply offering genuine support that makes a meaningful difference in the life of others*". Then, informant 5 shared, "*The necessary resources to conduct community service. These resources enable us to engage with and support the community effectively*". The respondents shared insights demonstrating that community involvement is a crucial commitment, which others might effortlessly choose not to be part of because it could affect the physiological and psychological function. In addition, the extension facilitated activities influence individuals in the community, which produced an impact in discovering and developing their knowledge, skills, and hidden talent; thus, they can boost their inner confidence and become effective (Niegas, 2024).

Support from various groups, whether private or government organizations, plays a substantial role in the effectiveness of the community extension services program. As informant 1 said, "*Aside from the support of the PCF, the local government unit of Barangay Bangcud is also very committed to helping the community, and their support is invaluable in our efforts*". Informant 2 stated, "*The PNP, as our department, needs to tap into their resources and support aside the institutional support. Their involvement will greatly enhance the impact of our extension programs*". Also, informants 4 and 5 expressed that "*The Barangay Officials have been instrumental in the success of our extension activities*" and "*The barangay support and active involvement make a big difference in the engagement and participation of the community while our institution serves as community hubs, bringing together for meaningful impact*". Then informant 5 shared that "*PCF's role is to provide us with the necessary resources while the support from the Barangay is crucial in ensuring the success of our programs*".

Based on the informants' responses, it is evident that the other organizations' institutional support and collaboration are essential to pursuing their community service goals (Raisiene et al., 2019). Their financial and moral support is paramount for community members, helping the extensionists build community programs that genuinely improve the lives of individuals in the community (Morre & Uy, 2025).

Challenges of Extension Implementers

Every extension implementer experienced a challenge in conducting community services. The difficulties and setbacks seem natural in every people's job. It can prevent people from facing obstacles where they pause and run out of patience to pursue their responsibilities. The extension implementers in the Philippine College Foundation face challenges in establishing community extension services activities. They highlight the financial constraints, transportation challenges, participant engagement, limited resource persons, and scheduling conflicts as adversity in serving the community.

Theme 4: Financial Constraints

According to informant 1, "*The budget for each activity is limited. Because of a limited budget, we cannot afford to provide some materials for the activities*". Informant 2, "*Community extension projects are greatly affected when the budget is limited. If even one resource is missing, it can create a sense of unpreparedness*". Informants 3 and 4 said, "*Financial constraints can significantly impact the planned schedule for extension services. To ensure the extension activity goes as planned, I have used my funds temporarily*". "*Limited resources like budget can compromise the quality of materials, training, and services, which may ultimately impact participant engagement and the program's overall outcomes*". Then informant 5 highlights the support of the institution; however, there is a limitation, "*The institution has provided the necessary resources, but there are limitations, particularly with the budget. If there are activities we want to conduct for the community but cannot do so due to budget constraints*".

Based on their responses, financial constraints are one of the challenges encountered in conducting community service. The limited budget for the extension activity affected various reasons, such as the inability to provide material. Some extensionists use their money for contingency funds to ensure the activity will be conducted and to avoid being saddened by the scheduled activities for the community (Medina, 2019).

Theme 5: Scheduling Conflicts

Scheduling conflicts is one of the challenging issues in conducting community service activities. As informant 1 relayed, *"We face challenges on scheduling activities for the community. Often, the schedule needs to be adjusted based on the community's availability"*, informant 3 imparted that *"Scheduling can be challenging due to everyone's commitments"*. These passages from the respondents featured that conflict schedules are among the challenges extension implementers experience in conducting community service, even though they had organized the activity earlier. Some rationales contribute to deferrals on the activity's schedule. As informant 5 said, *"Even setting up a plan earlier, circumstances have caused delays. For example, getting a letter approved is time-consuming, and once it is approved, there are additional processes to follow before you can access the budget"*. The conflict schedule is among the challenges that the extension implementers face in conducting community extension services for some reason, such as each faculty member having other commitments aside from conducting extension activities for the community (Sermona et al., 2021). Conflicts are consistently present, and they cause a significant interruption in any activities (Overton & Lowrey, 2013). Conflict issues progressively occur at work due to demands of responsibility (Castellini et al., 2022), such as team organization and deadlines.

Theme 6: Participant Engagement

Extension implementers figured out that community participation and engagement are among the challenges they have dealt with in implementing community service. Informant 1 said, *"Another challenge is the community's behavior. Unfortunately, some members are not open to helping themselves or growing. They are unwilling to participate, saying they cannot make time for it"*. Informant 2 added, *"Another difficulty we encounter is gathering participants. We must encourage them to participate actively, which can be challenging"*. Also, informant 4 voiced, *"Engaging community members and ensuring their participation can be difficult, particularly in areas with low interest or awareness of the available program"*.

The personal involvement of the participants in the community is not a positive attribute for the extensionist. It is very challenging for them to encourage the participants to get involved and expose themselves to the activities to foster learning and growth. The participant has a minimal interest in participating in some areas, especially late notification from the extensionist regarding the activities. Community participation is a notable factor in influencing community members to change (Rifkin, 2016). Over the past decades, passive participation has not been comprehensively investigated and seen as an ordinary performance in public engagement (Choi & Hur, 2023).

Theme 7: Limited Resource Persons

The extension implementers ascertain that finding the proper task force or a resource person to conduct a public service is enormously challenging. According to the statement of informant 1, identifying or inviting a resource speaker to share knowledge in the community is quite challenging for him. *"Finding the right resource speakers for the seminars and workshops on various topics is a challenge"*. Informant 5 articulated that seeking for support person to conduct community service is undoubtedly difficult for him. *"While many students, faculty, and staff could potentially volunteer, I have observed that their motivation and eagerness to help the community are not always on the same level as mine"*.

Extension implementers refer to the resource persons as people who can share knowledge and provide support. Resource persons who share their expertise and support the extension implementers are instrumental in serving the public, such as the community extension services program. Though several persons in the institution, such as faculty, staff, and students, are inclined to serve the community, their dedication differs from that of the extensionist, which causes another hassle for the extension implementers in motivating them and pursuing the activity for the community. Previous studies pointed out that community service is a demanding duty; it is a navigator process that includes resource persons to effectively maintain the program's success (Ozili, 2022). The different perspective in preserving the relationship between the implementers and the community is the assistant system of the extensions team (Inagaki & Orehek, 2017).

Coping Mechanism of Extension Implementers

The coping mechanism denotes human behaviors that address their challenges during the activities. According to Baqutayan (2015), coping methods through meditation-based stress management, which individuals are essential to endure a program similar to reduction-counseling. She also stated that coping mechanisms and stress are complementary to each other. Extension educators distinguished several strategies of coping mechanisms through setbacks and stress.

Theme 8: Resourcefulness in Implementation

Informant 4 said, *"Resourcefulness helps us navigate challenges and ensures that the extension implementers successfully carry out the activities."* Also, informant 5 pointed out that *"Being resourceful is a key. It is a strategy because we cannot predict or expect problems to happen."* Resourcefulness in implementation is one of the extensionist coping mechanisms for overcoming challenges. Resourcefulness is the ability that extension implementers can learn colloquially and professionally, but it is delimited by the personal advantages of resolving a challenge without conveying it to others. It means that being resourceful is a strategy to deal with the challenges of an extension implementer. Li et al. (2018) highlighted that resourcefulness is a multifaceted perception initiated with numerous connotations that analyzed the factors of the resourcefulness view.

Theme 9: Being Goal-Oriented

Extension implementers' primary purpose is to extend service to the community. As informant 1 said, *"I always remind myself that what we do is not for us. No matter what happens, we stay focused on our goal and purpose: to help the community"*. Also, informant 2 said, *"Always remember the core purpose of these activities for the community. If you face setbacks, take a moment to relax, then move forward with a positive mindset"*. Then informant 3 shared, *"I always remind myself of the purpose behind why I am here and why our team aims to serve. We must stay committed to that purpose, with no excuses for not helping the community"*. Informants 4 and 5 expressed, *"Focus on the goals and remind yourself of the broader impact of your work"* and *"Remind yourself of the purpose behind these activities and the extension program"*.

Extension implementers are still motivated despite facing setbacks. They maintain an optimistic perspective and focus on the purpose or the reason to foster a sense of volunteerism and civic engagement. The excessive goal-oriented attitude of leaders, such as extension implementers, positively impacts their supervision. According to Mango et al. (2019), extension implementers' goal-oriented strategy contributes to their achievement. Furthermore, the prior goal-setting theory correlates the two factors: goal setting and task purposes (Locke & Latham, 2020). This theory clarified and comprehended the effectiveness of effort engagement within the team. Focusing on the goal could lead to good performance despite difficulties (Ntoumanis et., 2013).

Theme 10: Effective Communication Strategies

The extension implementers emphasized that communication with the volunteers and team is imperative. As informant 1 said, *"In our team, most members are student volunteers. I inform them regularly about upcoming extension activities and ensure proper dissemination of information for a smooth execution"*. A similar thought was shared by informant 3, *"Communication is key because, without it, the activities would not run smoothly. Informants 4 and 5 shared that extension implementers must "Establish clear communication with team members and regularly discuss any challenges" and "Ask for their help. Though it may be challenging, we should practice communicating with them to earn their cooperation"*.

Their statement shows that communication is significant to a successful extension program. Frequent conversations with the extension team would lead to fruitful and productive performance. Any issues and lapses regarding the activities will be coped with modest communication. It is also a tool to seek team support and encourage participants to learn and grow. Communication is a regular concept in day-to-day life, and it involves sharing ideas and insights concerning efficient community service (Durga, 2022). Numerous modern procedures use extension implementers to communicate with people locally and globally. Effective communication is vital in extension activities, ensuring proper information flow and avoiding colleague confusion (Murphy, 2014).

Theme 11: Engaging in Recreational Activities

According to informant 1, *"After the activity, we usually have lunch to share our experiences and vent about the stress we have been feeling. It helps us release the negative energy; by the end, we have forgotten about the bad vibes"*. Informant 2 mentioned, *"Recharging yourself so you are strengthened by the morning and ready to work effectively. Balance rational thinking and thinking with physical activity"*. Then informant 3 relayed the need to *"take a coffee break and relax,"* while informant 4 said, *"Boost productivity by prioritizing tasks. To cope with stress, I engage in physical activities like jogging after work and take time to relax my mind"*. Informant 5 said, *"When I experience stress, I spend money on myself, almost like a treat yourself mentality, especially if I have gone through something challenging and feel it is worth a reward. If I do not have money, I will go somewhere where I can relax and focus on positive thoughts"*.

Recreational activities, such as indoor and outdoor activities, help extension implementers restore strength and motivation in both mental and physical aspects (Jaiyeoba, 2017). The experience of the extension implementers in coping with stress highlights the recreational activity where they can take a break. According to Li et al. (2018), there are three primary levels of recreation, namely, activities, settings, and motivation. They can do indoor and outdoor recreation such as eating, drinking coffee, physical activities, and pampering themselves. Through these, they can work effectively and efficiently.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the driving force of extension implementers in conducting community service was influenced by other extension implementers and their previous experience. They are driven by passion for service and a sense of social responsibility to impact the community positively. During the conduct of community services, extension implementers encountered challenges such as financial constraints, scheduling conflicts, participant engagement issues, and limited resources. They cope with challenges by being resourceful and goal-oriented, practicing effective communication strategies, and engaging in recreational activities.

The institution might continue to enrich the driving force of extension implementers by providing continuous training, fostering a culture of social responsibility, and strengthening institutional support. Institutions may implement annual strategic planning and resource management initiatives to address the challenges faced by extension implementers. To support the well-being and resilience of extension implementers, organizations may continue to promote work-life balance and stress management strategies.

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